

# THE BITTERLEY HOARD – PART TWO – CONSERVATION

June 29, 2012 Peter Reavill Conservation, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology  
2012, Excavation, Finds, Periods, Post Medieval, Science Archaeology, British Museum, Department of  
Conservation and Research, Hoard, Museology, Peter Reavill, Pippa Pierce, The British Museum, United  
Kingdom



## Investigating the Hoard at the British Museum – Conservation



*Unpacking the Hoard*



*The top of the block*

The hoard reached the Department of Conservation and Research at the British Museum and was worked on by Pippa Pierce and colleagues in the department. Pippa had been involved from the start of the project giving really useful advice both before and after the excavation. The hoard was slowly excavated from its clay block and over time the container and the coins within were revealed.



*Partially excavated*



*The coins within the pot*

The coins were excavated stratigraphically to see if there was a structure to the deposits – were the coins at the top more recent than those at the bottom?



The excavation showed that there was no difference between the layers and that they had been thoroughly mixed before deposition. What was interesting was that it seems as if the coins were placed in the vessel in small stacks or columns and several groups of coins were removed in this way. In total there were 138 coins all of high denomination -many were very well preserved.



The container was revealed to be a local 'blackware' vessel called a tyg. Tyg's are multi-handled drinking cups / mugs. They have several handles as the sides of the pot are thin and the contents are often hot (and highly alcoholic). This meant they could be passed from person to person without burning fingers; it is also thought that the handles segregated the rim and so each person would have their own section and so drinking would be more hygienic. The size of the vessel is about standard for those known from the period (diameter 88mm). The vessel was slightly cracked and the rim damaged through compression within the soil – so if the finder had tried to lift it without help it could well have broken into many pieces.



*The purse inside the pot*



*Impressions of the coin in the leather*

A relatively unique find within the hoard was that the vessel was lined with the well preserved remains of a fine leather purse. The leather is very fragile and the impressions of the coins can be clearly seen preserved within it. Its survival is rare as leather and other organic material seldom survive in the soil. If the finder had dug the hoard himself and emptied the contents of the vessel then it is likely that this unique element would have been severely damaged or lost as it is so fragile.



*Removing the coins*



*Inside the pot – coins and leather*



*The pot and purse*

See next post: **The Bitterley Hoard – Part Three – The Coins**

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29th June 2012